Fostering women entrepreneurship in the tourism industry: a look into obstacles and opportunities of women selling arts and crafts around the Kruger national park

Thandi Susan Ngomane (a)*

(a) University of Limpopo, C/O R71 Tzaneen Road and University Street Mankweng Township, Polokwane, Limpopo Province, South Africa

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the obstacles and opportunities for women who sell arts and crafts along the borders of the Kruger National Park in Mpumalanga Province of South Africa. The Kruger National Park is one of South Africa’s most famous symbols, both nationally and internationally. Women who stay along the borders of the Kruger National Park have also harnessed tapping into the tourism sector by trading in arts and crafts because tourists purchase them as souvenirs. Women dominate the craft industry because of fewer barriers to entry as they normally use traditional skills to create crafts. South African women in the informal sector are said to be significantly contributing to the Gross Domestic Product of the country. A qualitative research design utilising a Case study was used to explore the obstacles and opportunities for women who trade in arts and crafts in the tourism industry around the Kruger National Park. Data was collected through semi-structured interview schedules from thirty (30) women who sell arts and crafts from the Kruger National Park gates in Mpumalanga Province.

The key findings reveal that women face various challenges, mainly in terms of (i) lack of access to finance, (ii) low literacy levels (iii) lack of access to infrastructure and (iv) Poor marketing skills and access to markets.

Introdution

Tourism around the globe both domestic and international is said to be contributing to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of many countries through the creation of jobs (SANParks, 2009; Meyer, 2021; Adinolfi, Harilal & Giddy, 2021; World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), 2021; UN Women, 2022). Most women are said to rely on and benefit from tourism and this enables them to fight poverty and hunger at household level. The reason for the high cluster of women within the tourism industry is said to be because no real formal education and finance to enter the industry is needed. It is also easy for women within the arts and crafts sector to balance productive and reproductive work subsequently, most of the products sold for arts and crafts are manufactured at home (Hay, 2008; The World Bank Group, 2017). Since the Kruger National Park is one of South Africa’s most famous symbols, women who stay along its borders have harnessed tapping into the tourism sector by trading in arts and crafts as tourists purchase them as souvenirs. This has created jobs for women thus enabling them to earn a living.

The 2017-2022 Statistics South Africa report indicates that out of the 18.0 million households in South Africa, 7.6 million (42.1%) were headed by females, especially in provinces which have a high number of rural areas such as the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, Free State, Mpumalanga and Limpopo. The rate of unemployment for women in Mpumalanga in 2022 was 41.2% as compared to men who were at 36.5% (Republic of South Africa, 2017-2022). South Africa is said to be one of the countries with high poverty, unemployment and inequality levels especially amongst women. The tourism industry is said to have the ability to create jobs and allow women to fight hunger and poverty, hence they are found in large numbers within the sector (Deen, Harilal & Achu, 2016;
RSA 2019; Meyer, 2021). This study explores the obstacles and opportunities for women who sell arts and crafts along the borders of the Kruger National Park in Mpumalanga Province of South Africa. The results of a study by Nomnga (2021) on the ability of the tourism industry to drive economic growth in the Eastern Cape of South Africa, indicate that women in the Eastern Cape can generate income for their households and thus transform their living standards. A sample of thirty (30) women who sell arts and crafts from three gates around the Kruger National Park in Mpumalanga Province were selected for the study. Data was collected through a semi-structured interview schedule and was then summarised to capture emerging themes as well as opinions, attitudes and perceptions. This paper is organized as follows: following the introduction part, a second part is a literature review with theoretical and empirical studies that shed light on linkage between theory and practice. The third part introduces the background information on research and methodology. After analysis and findings of the study, the author provides discussions and implications. Finally, this paper concludes with key points, recommendations, future research directions and limitations.

**Literature Review**

The literature review will cover the content covering existing research on women in the arts and crafts sector with a critical evaluation and discussion. The literature review will cover legislative frameworks, women as active participants in the tourism sector, available opportunities for women who sell arts and craft around the Kruger National Park in Mpumalanga and their challenges.

**Legislative Framework**

Different legislative frameworks are in place by the South African Government to regulate the tourism sector both at national and municipal levels. These frameworks monitor the impact of tourism on development and growth of the economic sector, impact on communities especially disadvantaged minorities and also the preservation and protection of the environment and heritage sector of the country. The South African Government is also a signatory to treaties that advance the protection and empowerment of women such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). SDG 1 compels governments to create policy frameworks and gender-sensitive development strategies to eradicate poverty for women., and SDG 2 puts emphasis on ending hunger and achieving food security. The South African National Development Plan accentuate the importance of infrastructure in the rural areas to boost tourism. Tourism is seen as being able to contribute to entrepreneurship and job creation (RSA, 2017-2022). Despite the amount of progress made regarding women empowerment worldwide, it is befitting to indicate that many women still struggle with benefiting from the progress made. There are still challenges with the protection of women’s human rights when compared to men (The World Bank Group, 2017) hence the face of poverty still remains female.

**The Kruger National Park and Women in Arts And Crafts**

The Kruger National Park was proclaimed in 1936 as a National Park and covers nearly 2 million hectares of land that stretches for 352 kilometers (20 000 square kilometers) covering two provinces, i.e. Mpumalanga and Limpopo. It also borders Zimbabwe and Mozambique and is managed by the South African National Parks (SANParks). The Kruger National Park is one of the important sources of tourism in South Africa, stimulating economic growth in the two provinces (SANParks, 2008; SANParks, 2016). During the apartheid era, black communities were forcefully removed from the park and most of these communities are now living adjacent to the park. The recent years have seen the Kruger National Park focusing on rebuilding relations with the communities through policies that foster the creation of business and jobs for locals, arts and craft markets, access to the park and other activities related to tourism meant to benefit the local communities (SANParks, 2008). The Kruger National Park also creates jobs through the recruitment of locals in different categories within the park such as administrative, park rangers and the local procurement of arts and crafts from women within the different structures built by the park.

Most research supports the notion of the tourism sector as a driver of economic growth and job creation, thus having the ability to uplift the living standards of women (RSA, 1996; WTTC, 2020). The results of a study by Strickland-Munro, Moore & Freitag-Ronaldson on the impact of tourism on communities around the Kruger National Park in 2010, indicated that there were benefits for communities around the Kruger National Park in that there was creation of jobs inside the park for locals and for those selling arts and crafts. Kruger National Park has built structures where women sell their arts and crafts such as at Paul Kruger, Phabeni and Crocodile Bridge gates in Mpumalanga Province. These structures are offered freely to local women and they are equipped with storage space, ablution facilities, electricity and running water. The park also assist women in arts and crafts with training by utilising service providers to help them to diversify and perfect their products. The only shortcoming is that the focus is only on informal domestic markets since they have not as yet expanded their services to accessing formal domestic and international markets. Since there is a high demand for hand crafts by the corporate sector, government, fashion industry, decorative products for homes, hotels and restaurants; the park assist women with the opportunity to provide arts and crafts needed by lodges around the park and also by the park itself (RSA, 2019).

**Women’s Challenges Within the Arts and Craft Sector**

The arts and craft sector is defined as the ability of women to produce decorative items by hand using natural and synthetic materials. This includes weaving, ceramics, furniture, glass, jewelry, metalwork, mosaic, paper, stone carving, textiles and wood (ILO, 2007; Brown, 2016; Abisuga-Oyekunle & Fillis, 2017). There are facets of the tourism sector such as accommodation; travel agencies cultural activities; sports and recreation, retail, that make the tourism industry to thrive. It is supported by domestic or international...
tourists. Women then find their niche within these facets of tourism, particularly within the arts and crafts niche (The World Bank Group, 2017; UNWTO, 2008; WTTC, 2020; WTTC, 2021; Shivakoti, 2022; UN Women, 2022). South African women around tourist prone areas have long harnessed the skill to eek a living within the tourism sector especially within arts and crafts sector. Most of arts and crafts sales takes place on the streets along tourist prone areas and is dominated by women as opposed to men (RSA, 1995; The South African Craft Industry, 1998; Abisuga-Oyekunlea & Fillis, 2017; Mopeli, 2018). By selling arts and craft on the streets, women are able to meet basic needs such as food, water, health and education for their children because, due to the unemployment rate, women are desperate to provide for their families (Elijah-Mensah, 2009; Nyawo & Mubangizi, 2015; Malema & Naidoo, 2017).

The argument presented by Reddy & Moletsane (2009) about the face of poverty being female is that, due to high unemployment rates and the need to survive and meet basic human needs, street vending has become rampant all over the world where women sell wares on the streets or designated market places to earn a living. Street trading does not need a lot of capital to start a business hence it is easier for women to borrow from each other or from family members and buy the commodities to sell on the street (ILO, 2007). Due to movement restriction caused by household activities which are normally done by women due to patriarchal division of household labour, women normally find themselves trading in places that are nearer to their home so they can balance both their reproductive and productive responsibilities. Various challenges faced by women in the arts and crafts sector such as, poor access to finance, literacy levels, lack of access to infrastructure, poor marketing skills and inaccessible markets, make it difficult for them to grow their businesses beyond subsistence levels.

**Poor access to finance**

Even though it is easy for women to enter the arts and craft fraternity in tourism due to low level need for finance, they are however unable to get financing from formal financial institutions in order to grow their businesses from small to medium sized businesses (Mashigo & Schoeman, 2012; Mopeli, 2018). Women need access to finance for production costs such as the production space, transportation, machinery, equipment and raw materials (RSA, 1996; Tassin 2014; Chinomona & Maziriri, 2015; The World Bank Group, 2017). Most women use savings clubs’ money to buy synthetic material whilst natural material such as grass, reed, trees, seeds does not really need production costs as production is normally done at home (RSA 2019).

**Low literacy levels**

There are various barriers that hold women back in terms of participating in the economy, and low literacy levels are mentioned as a barrier. Low educational levels especially amongst rural women is said to hinder their progress in growing their arts and crafts to viable commercial businesses (Deen, Harilal & Achu, 2016; The World Bank Group, 2017; Malema & Naidoo, 2017; Nomnga, 2021). The low literacy levels are hindrance since it makes it impossible for women to understand market information such as consumer preferences, marketing strategies, standards and market requirements. The knowledge of processes and legislation regarding market information acts as a barrier for most women. Technology such as computers which women use to access market information are said not be easily available for rural women (Strickland-Munro, Moore & Freitag-Ronaldson, 2010; AfDB, 2015; Mawazo & Kisangiri, 2015; Hlanyane & Acheampong, 2017; Mopeli, 2018; RSA 2019; RSA, 2017-2022). Low literacy levels amongst women make them fail to negotiate contracts and thus rely on middlemen or agents (Mehra & Rojas, 2008; Hill & Vigneri, 2009; RSA 2019). Using middlemen is very costly for women as it chips on their profit and has a tendency of making women vulnerable to exploitation. Women are unable to get competitive prices for their goods as the middlemen only strive to buy commodities cheaper from women but sell at high price to maximise their own profit (Kaiser Associates, 2005).

**Lack of access to infrastructure**

Most women selling arts and craft do not have proper shelters or structures to do so. Even though some municipalities have tried to build shelters, they are either in a dilapidated state or come at an unaffordable monthly payments (Mkhize et al, 2013; Gamieldien & van Niekerk, 2017; Monga & Dzvimbo, 2019). The Kruger National Park has structures for women to sell arts and craft and they also have safe storage, electricity and water at no charge. These are only available at Kruger, Phabeni and Crocodile Bridge gates in Mpumalanga and the women who utilise them have indicated that these structures assist providing the much needed shelter and storage. Efforts were made to recruit more women selling arts and crafts to utilise the structures, however, some women preferred selling alongside the main roads to the park. Those selling along the roads leading to the park and in other areas in the province unfortunately do not have access to storage, sanitation, electricity and water (RSA, 1996)

**Poor marketing skills and access to markets**

To make the arts and crafts business viable of women, it is important that they be innovative so that their products attract tourists, more so because women often sell the same commodities without diversity. It is argued that this is because most arts and craft producers lack competitive skills in diversifying their product designs (RSA, 1996; Tassin 2014; Makitha, 2016; Shivakoti, 2022). A study by Kaiser and Associates on the scope of the arts sector in the Western Cape (2005) indicated that the lack of design skills makes crafters to focus on supply rather than demand driven production. For women to thrive within the arts and crafts industry, there is a need for mindset shift to designing attractive artifacts that will address market demands (Chinomona & Maziriri, 2015; Nyawo & Mubangizi; Hlanyane & Acheampong, 2017; Mopeli, 2018; RSA 2019). Asian markets are said to have harnessed the skill hence their mass production of African artifacts which affects the supply and demand of African artefacts for locals. African artifacts
making is often passed from one generation to the other, and most women are said to be producing arts and crafts the same way it was taught to them by their relatives without any innovation thus giving Asian markets an upper hand in the production and selling of African arts and crafts (Mopeli, 2018; Shivakoti, 2022). It thus become important that women be trained in skills such as design, production and marketing (Karasi, Shambare & Nkondo, 2017; Jokia, Swanepoel & Venter, 2021).

Countries with strong economies are driving the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) (Manda & Daou, 2019) and as such it is important for women in arts and crafts to enhance their skills if they are to keep up with the world and help their business thrive. According to Nyawo & Mubangizi (2015), the positive side of technology is the creation of uniform quality products which will meet the standards needed for such products. For rural women in the arts and crafts sector, advanced technology will remain an unachievable dream compounded by low literacy levels, lack of access to finance, markets and low skills. The basic access to the internet by South African women is an impossible task albeit it being a necessity (Makhitha, 2017). The fact that women must balance productive and reproductive work affects their access to training due to mobility constraints which in turn affects their productivity within any business sector (The World Bank Group, 2017; Hlayane & Acheampong, 2017; WTTC, 2021; Shivakoti, 2022).

Theoretical and conceptual background

The study is in anchored in the Women in Development (WID) approach which advocates for the promotion of women empowerment by advocating for their participation in development. This can be advanced through gender sensitive policies done in consultation with women formations instead of excluding them as indicated by the WID approach. WID places the onus of development and growth on women’s economic capacity, especially with the creation of jobs. To bring the WID approach to fruition for women in arts and crafts, it is crucial that they be consulted and represented in local economic initiatives by local government in order to influence policy. Targeted efforts that include women selling arts and crafts will benefit women in the tourism sector as key drivers of economic development, enabling them to meet strategic gender needs. The WID approach also focuses on addressing barriers to women’s participation such as the social, economic, political, education, decision-making power and poverty. According to the WID approach, if women are provided with access to resources such as skills training, access to credit and small-scale income generating activities, they will be enabled to overcome barriers to economic independence (Kishan, 2022; Yeh, 2018). Perused literature indicates that most arts and craft producers lack competitive skills in diversifying their product designs (RSA, 1996; Tassin 2014; Makhitha, 2016; Shivakoti, 2022;) leading to poor access to markets (Mopeli, 2018; Shivakoti, 2022). Markets are said to be male dominated because according to the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO) (2013), men frame the rules regarding access to markets to suit their needs which unintentionally excludes women. This is exacerbated by the lack of knowledge of processes and legislation regarding market information. Essential technology to access market information is also not accessible for women (AfDB, 2015; Mawazo & Kisangiri, 2015). It is irrefutable that the arts and crafts sector contributes to job creation particularly for women in rural areas, application of the WID model will ensure women’s economic capacity leading to creation of jobs.

Research methodology

This study is qualitative research utilising a Case study to explore the obstacles and opportunities for women who trade in arts and crafts in the tourism industry around the Kruger National Park. A purposive sampling method was used to identify thirty (30) female participants selling arts and craft at the Paul Kruger, Phabeni and Crocodile Bridge Gates of the Kruger National Park. Both primary and secondary data was used in the study. Secondary data was collected from research reports and literature on women and the arts and craft sector and an unstructured interview schedule administered via face-to-face interviews to collect primary data. Consent was sought from participants before the administration of the interview schedule. Data was then organized into themes and patterns in accordance with the questionnaire and evaluated consonantly with the aim of the study.

Findings and discussions

Biographical information

A larger number of the respondents (80%) were women aged between 40-70 years of age. 60% who did not have matric as a qualification. The low literacy levels according to perused literature are a hindrance since it makes it impossible for women to understand market information such as consumer preferences, marketing strategies, standards and market requirements (The World Bank Group, 2017; Malema & Naidoo, 2017; Nomnga, 2021). Undisputedly, women have skills passed on from generation to generation on the creation of arts and crafts, it is however crucial that government with the private sector ensure access to technical and vocational training to perfect the skills to increase access to markets. Tailored training initiatives that will take into consideration the level of education for women will be of great significance. Women who are better educated within the sector can do brokering function ensuring that there is varying empowerment in different fields.

Access to finance

Unemployed women according to perused literature struggle to get financing from formal financial institutions (Mashigo & Schoeman, 2012; Mopeli, 2018) and this is attested by respondents (70%) who confirmed that they did not have any start-up finance for their arts and craft businesses. The women indicated that if they had access to finance, they would be able to source synthetic
materials in bulk and also buy machinery to manufacture things like glass beads, ceramic cups and plates. Women in arts and crafts can find their niche in local economic drive by local government which necessitate that they form part of development planning. It is in this sphere that they will be able to influence policy so they have the power to fight poverty and have access to financial support. This will enable South Africa to realise SDG 1 through the creation policy frameworks and gender-sensitive development strategies to eradicate poverty for women.

Poor marketing skills and access to markets

A majority (99%) of the interviewed women indicated that they have not received any formal training with regard to the arts and craft they were producing but that most of their skill is self-taught or passed on by family members. Only one woman indicated that she was trained by a Non-Governmental Organisation whilst she was staying in the Eastern Cape. They also indicated that they were aware of the poor quality of their products as compared to those manufactured by machinery. They said if they can be skilled in producing good quality products that can be exported to other countries, they would be able to grow their businesses. This assertion by women is supported by a study by Kaiser and Associates on the scope of the arts sector in the Western Cape (2005) the results of which indicated that the lack of design skills makes crafters to focus on supply rather than demand driven production. The importance of training in skills such as design, production and marketing is emphasized by Karasi, Shambare & Nkondo (2017); and Jokia, Swanepoel & Venter (2021) to assist in creating market related products. Women who have already perfected the skill to produce quality arts and crafts can be utilised to train others. The fact that they all produced the same products without variety was also a concern raised by 90% of the women interviewed because they realized that they stood a greater chance of making sales when the arts and crafts were not similar.

None of the women had access to formal markets, they instead sold their arts and craft to tourists. They indicated that they had no idea how to access formal domestic and international markets. Targeted efforts such as the creation of one arts and crafts support unit or cooperative led by local government through local economic development enterprises, where women can sell their crafts in large quantities to the unit or cooperative and these then sold to a wider market through one entity. This endeavor would assist women to access arts and crafts markets.

Access to infrastructure

According to perused literature, most women selling arts and craft do not have proper shelters or structures to do so (RSA, 1996; Hlanyane & Acheampong, 2017). The National Development Plan 2030 puts emphasis on infrastructure in rural areas to boost tourism (RSA, 2017-2022). In the study, women who sold arts and craft inside the Kruger National Park have access to shelters built by the park which includes sanitation, water, electricity and storage for their wares, except for those who traded outside the Paul Kruger gate. Women who traded outside the gate did however admit that they were approached by the park to move to the shelters inside the park but they refused because of the competitiveness of their business. Since they sell similar artifacts, they felt they had an advantage because they were the first contact with tourists and as such stood a better chance of making sales. Even though the park provided shelters for trading there are no structures where women manufactured their wares both inside and outside the park. The manufacturing was done at home instead of a common shelter. The provision of infrastructure will assist women in having common space to manufacture and store arts and crafts. Nevertheless, there is still space for more research on the role of manufacturing shelters in lessening the burden of storage for women in arts and crafts.

Conclusion

A large number (70%) of the sample of women (30) selling arts and craft at three gates of the Kruger National Park in Mpumalanga did not have matric as a qualification, this compounded by lack of skills training was an obstacle for them to access both domestic and international markets. Confirmed by what is postulated by literature, women selling arts and crafts do not have access to formal financial institutions but rely on informal savings clubs and family members to start-up businesses. Even though the women have the skills in making artifacts, the fact that they have never received any formal training has a negative impact on the quality of products being sold. In order to lessen the burden of reproductive work for women selling arts and crafts, formal sheltered workshops would go a long way in resolving storage problems. One limitation of the study is that the sample might not be representative of arts and crafts all the other seven gates. There are ten (10) entrances into the Kruger National Park for Mpumalanga and Limpopo Provinces, Mpumalanga has got five entrances of which only three have women trading in arts and crafts. Another limitation to the study was funding constraints because travelling for the collection of data was self-funded, hence only the focus of the study was in Mpumalanga Province and excluded Limpopo with the furthest gate being more than 500km away. This has a bearing on the quality of the results as they may not accurately represent challenges and opportunities of women selling arts and crafts around the Kruger National Park. It is recommended that:

i. Tailored training initiatives that will take into consideration the level of education for women will be of great significance. Women who are better educated within the sector can do brokering function ensuring that there is varying empowerment in different fields.

ii. It is Women in arts and crafts can find their niche in local economic initiatives by local government which necessitate that they form part of development planning initiatives. It is in this sphere that they will be able to influence policy so they have the power to fight poverty.
iii. Targeted efforts such as the creation of arts and crafts support units led by local government through local economic development initiatives, where women can sell their crafts in large quantities to the units and these then sold to a wider market has the ability to empower women financially and create jobs. This endeavour would also assist them to access arts and crafts markets.

iv. The provision of infrastructure by local government through local development initiatives will assist women in having common space to manufacture and store arts and crafts.

v. An opportunity for creation of mass supply of arts and crafts through one entity be created to enable the youth to act as brokers.

vi. Women have representation within local economic development structures to advocate for the needs of women selling arts and crafts.

vii. Nevertheless, there is still space for more research on the role of manufacturing shelters in lessening the burden of storage for women in arts and crafts.

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